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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1969, a survey was conducted on the extent and nature of economic education in Oregon public high schools. The purpose of the survey was to determine the number of public high schools in the State that offer economics as a separate course, the proportion of high school students enrolled in these courses, the competence of high school economics teachers, and the role of economic education in Oregon compared to its status in other states. Approximately 1000 questionnaires were distributed to the social studies teachers of Oregon with a yield of 305 usable questionnaires which form the basis of this study. A capsule summary of the significant results reported here indicates that: 1) of the 211 public high schools, 49 offered a separate course in economics during the 1968-69 school year; 2) in those schools where economics is offered, about 8% of the student body elects to take the course; 3) slightly more than 2% of all students were enrolled in economics; 4) about 12% of the teachers had the equivalent of a major in college economics, and 18% had the equivalent of a minor; and, 5) compared to other states, economic education in Oregon high schools is about ten years behind the national norm. (Author)

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economic education in oregon public high schools

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THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN OREGON PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1969, a survey was conducted on the extent and nature of economic education in Oregon public high schools. The purpose of the survey was to determine the number of public high schools in the State that offer economics as a separate course, the proportion of Oregon high school students enrolled in these courses, the competence of high school economics teachers, and, finally, the role of economic education in Oregon compared to its status in other states. A capsule summary of the significant results indicates that:

(1) of the 211 public high schools in the State, 49 (23.2%) offered a separate course in economics during the 1968-69 school year.

(2) in those schools where economics is offered, about 8% of the student body elects to take the course.

(3) slightly more than 2% of all Oregon high school students were enrolled in economics.

(4) about 12% of the State's high school economics teachers had the equivalent of a major in college economics, and 18% had the equivalent of a minor.

(5) compared to other states, economic education in Oregon high schools is about ten years behind the national norm.

CONTENTS

Abstract iii

Introduction v

I Economic Education in Oregon's Public High Schools . . . 1

A. Courses Specifically Designated Economics 1

B. Economic Content of Other Courses in the Social Studies Curriculum 4

II Economic Education of Social Studies Teachers 5

A. Those Who Teach at Least One Economics Course . . . 5

B. All Other Social Studies Teachers 6

III The Status of Economic Education in Oregon High Schools Compared with the Experience of Other States . . 9

IV Some Concluding Observations 12

Bibliography 13

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1969, approximately one thousand questionnaires were distributed to the social studies teachers of Oregon in an attempt to determine the extent and nature of economic education in the State's public high schools. The survey yielded 305 usable questionnaires which form the basis of this study. The report is divided into four parts, the first of which concerns the amount of economic education in the social studies curriculum. The second examines the academic background of social studies teachers with particular emphasis on the college economic courses completed. The third section is a comparison of economic education in Oregon to that in other states and gives some relative meaning to the data collected. The fourth, and final, part of this study contains some observations and conclusions about economic education in the State's public high schools.

I ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN OREGON'S PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

A. COURSES SPECIFICALLY DESIGNATED ECONOMICS

According to the State Department of Education, there are 211 public high schools in Oregon, and 49 (23.2%) offer a course in economics. Of the 1,000 or so[1] social studies teachers in the State, 59 teach at least one course in economics. Collectively these teachers returned 34 questionnaires from which much of the following information was derived.

1. As one might suspect, the larger the social studies staff, the greater the probability that an economics course is offered by a particular high school. It is obvious that staff size varies directly with student population and so it follows that large schools are more apt to have an economics course than small ones. While staff size is an important determinant in course offering, it is not the only one. Also important is the availability of a capable person

TABLE I

Distribution of High Schools by Size of Social Studies Staff

Size of Staff	No. of Schools	Schools Offering Economics	
		No.	%
3 or less	101	9	8.9
4 to 7	55	16	29.0
8 to 11	28	11	39.2
12 to 15	16	6	37.5
16 to 19	7	4	57.1
20 or more	4	3	75.0
Totals	211	49	23.2

[1]According to the Department of Education, there are 1,184 social studies teachers in the State's public high schools. The schools themselves, however, have a different opinion. Many of the schools responding to the survey claimed less social studies teachers than the Department of Education reported they had. The difference between the two estimates was usually one or two people.

willing to teach economics. In nearly every school with 3 or less social studies teachers that offers economics, the person teaching the course is usually one whose major academic interest, beside secondary education, is economics.

2. Of the 49 high schools in Oregon that offer a course in economics, 29 responded to the survey. In nearly all of these schools, economics is a separate one-semester course, though in some of them it is part of the modern problems sequence. In most schools economics is an elective. Where it is required, about 30% of the student body takes the course, but the overall weighted average is 8.2%.

TABLE II

Percentage of Student Body Enrolled In
An Economics Course, 1968-69

Percentage of Student Body	No. of Schools
less than 3	5
3 - 5	7
6 - 8	6
9 - 11	5
12 - 14	2
15 or more	4
	29

It is not possible to tell precisely what percentage of Oregon high school students were enrolled in an economics course in the 1968-69 school year, but with the data available a reasonable estimate can be determined. The 29 high schools that answered the survey comprise 13.7% of all the public high schools in the State and account for 15.7% of the State's 194,000 students as of fall, 1968. Each of these 29 schools has an average student body of nearly 1,020. Assuming that the other 20 schools which offer economics but did not respond to the survey have the same average size student body, then the 49 schools taken together have approximately 50,000 students. If it is the case that 8.2% of these 50,000 students were exposed to economics, then we can deduce that slightly more than 2% of all the high school students in the State were enrolled in an economics course in 1968.

3. As part of the survey, teachers of economics courses were asked to list the text they use, and their replies are summarized in Table III. Few teachers use just one text. The one book most cited is The Worldly Philosophers, and of those written specifically for high school, Economics for Our Time and Our American Economy are the most popular. The last two books, as is the case with most of the high school texts, are primarily institutional and empirical. They give a lot of information about the economic experience of the United States, such as trends in national income, employment statistics, and the growth of per capita income over time. Also included are descriptions of key institutions, such as the commercial banking system, the Federal Reserve, and some elements of public finance.

TABLE III

Text Commonly Used in the Economics Course

Title	Author	No. of Schools Using
The Worldly Philosophers	Heilbroner	9
Our American Economy	Lindholm & Driscoll	8
Economics for Our Time	A. Smith	6
Economics	Samuelson	5
Understanding Our Economy	Mortenson, et. al.	4
An Introduction to the American Economy*	Gordon & Witchel	2
Economics, U.S.A.*	Leith & Lumpkin	1
Other Materials		22

Some of the books (those noted with asterisks in Table III) are analytically oriented and are equivalent to a text that might be used in a one-semester college economics course. Taking all the high school texts collectively, it is common to find in their pages such things as the determination of equilibrium price and quantity via the intersection of demand and supply curves, a circular flow chart of national income, the concept of a model, and a discussion of economic growth and stability. The more analytical books have been published just recently, usually within the last three or four years, and probably indicate the direction in which high school economics is moving.

B. ECONOMIC CONTENT OF OTHER COURSES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

It is nearly universal that every teacher on the social studies staff gives five courses per term, usually with duplications, but not necessarily all of them in social studies. Most social studies teachers do not teach an economics course, but this does not mean that their courses are devoid of economic content. Few teachers reported that their social studies courses contained absolutely no economics. This included even those teaching specialized topics, such as psychology, sociology, and political science, though in these cases economic material constituted less than 15% of the course for the most part. The social studies courses offered by most high schools are listed in Table IV along with a measure of their economic content. In a majority of these courses, economics comprises 1/5 to 1/4 of the material presented, though by the very nature of the courses the economics taught falls into the categories of political economy, economic history, and economic geography. It is not uncommon for a teacher of the courses listed in Table IV to use as a text or reference materials the same books used in the economics courses.

TABLE IV

Economic Content of Select Courses in the Social Studies Curriculum

Course Title	No. of Courses Taught by Percentage of Economic Content			
	15% or less	16-25%	26-35%	35% or more
U. S. History	34	65	22	6
Modern Problems	16	49	20	14
World Geography	6	25	2	4
World History	18	24	2	4
World Culture	3	9	2	0

II ECONOMIC EDUCATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

A. THOSE WHO TEACH AT LEAST ONE ECONOMICS COURSE

All social studies teachers were asked to specify their primary field of academic interest other than secondary education. The results for those who teach economics are given in Table V, while that for all other is presented in part B of this section. As is evident from the table, 23.5% of the economics teachers responding to the survey showed a preference for history. Approximately 32% were in economics and business, and another 30% in general social studies and several other fields, such as sociology and political science.

TABLE V

Primary Field of Academic Interest
Other Than Secondary Education

Teachers of Economics Only

Area	No. of Teachers	% of Teachers
History	8	23.5%
Business Administration	7	20.5%
Social Studies	5	14.7%
Economics	4	11.7%
Others	5	14.7%
No Response	5	14.7%
Totals	34	99.8%

Besides their academic interest, economics teachers were asked to list the number and title of all economics they had ever taken, including summer institutes and workshops. This information is summarized in Tables VI and VII. The tabulation of Table VI presented some difficulties, as a few teachers had taken courses on the semester basis, but most had matriculated within the quarter system. For the sake of clarification, two semesters are equal to three quarters, which in turn represents one academic year in a particular course. Since semester courses were but a small portion of all courses taken by economics teachers, they are listed as

quarter-courses in Table VI. In this table in particular, then, and throughout the report in general, three courses constitutes one academic year in economics, and six courses, two academic years.

TABLE VI

Number of Economics Courses
Taken by Teachers of Economics

No. of Courses	Teachers No.	Teachers %	Cumulative % of Teachers
0	0	---	---
1	3	8.8%	100.0%
2	6	17.6%	91.1%
3*	6	17.6%	73.5%
4	4	11.7%	55.8%
5	5	14.7%	44.1%
6	4	11.7%	29.4%
7 or more	6	17.6%	17.6%
	34	99.7%	

*One academic year

From Table VI it is apparent that nearly three-fourths of these teachers completed three or more economics courses. Over half, 55.8%, have taken four or more courses, which in most cases meant completing the principles sequence plus some upper division course or courses. The exact titles of the courses taken are summarized in Table VII, and, as obvious, principles of economics was the overwhelming selection of the economics teachers. The most popular advanced courses were Comparative Economic Systems and summer institutes and workshops.

B. ALL OTHER SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

As the economics teachers, all other social studies teachers were asked to give their field of academics other than secondary education, the number of economics courses they have taken, and the titles of those courses. In Table VIII the social studies teachers are categorized by fields of academic interests. When this data is compared to Table V, it is apparent that economics and business administration have less favor with the general social studies teacher than with those who teach economics. This implies, albeit weakly, that those who have taken some economics are more likely to teach the course than those who have not. This is not a

very startling revelation, but an important one, since the situation might very well be the other way around.

TABLE VII

Specific College Economics Courses
Taken by Economics Teachers

Course	No. of Teachers	% of Teachers
Principles (at least one course)	30	88.2%
Comparative Economics Systems	10	29.4%
Economics Institutes & Workshops	8	23.5%
Economic Geography	5	14.7%
Money & Banking	5	14.7%
Labor Economics	5	14.7%
Economic History (U.S.)	4	11.7%
National Income Theory	4	11.7%
Price Theory	3	8.8%
History of Economic Thought	3	8.8%
Public Finance	2	5.8%
Others	9	26.4%
No Response*	3	8.8%

*Three teachers majored in economics and merely state this fact without specifying the courses they had taken.

TABLE VIII

Primary Field of Academic Interest
Other Than Secondary Education

Social Studies Teachers Who Do Not Teach Economics

Area	No. of Teachers	% of Teachers
History	88	32.4%
General Social Studies	53	19.5%
Political Science	9	3.3%
Sociology	8	2.9%
Economics	7	2.5%
Business Administration	6	2.2%
Others	43	15.8%
No Response	57	21.0%
	271	

Not only do those interested in economics teach it, but they have usually taken more economics courses than other social studies teachers (Tables VI and IX). The big difference in economics courses taken between the two groups of teachers, i.e., those who teach economics and those who do not, is that all of the economics teachers have taken at least one college economics course, while 11.8% of all the other social studies teachers have not.

TABLE IX

Number of Economic Courses Taken by Social Studies Teachers Who Do Not Teach Economics

No. of Courses	Teachers No.	Teachers Percent	Cumulative % of Teachers
0	32	11.8%	100.0%
1	58	21.4%	88.1%
2	58	21.4%	66.7%
3*	66	24.3%	45.3%
4	26	9.5%	21.0%
5	11	4.0%	11.4%
6	8	2.9%	7.3%
7 or more	12	4.4%	4.4%
	271	99.7%	

*One academic year

In addition to taking less economics courses than economics teachers, social studies teachers have a preference for different ones. The most popular upper division course taken by economics teachers is comparative systems, but for the other social studies teachers it is economic history. Other than the last course mentioned, the social studies teachers show no clear preference for a specific course, choosing nearly equally from Economic Geography, Labor Economics, and Money and Banking.

TABLE X

Specific College Economics Courses
Completed by Social Studies Teachers

Course	No. of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Principles (at least one course)	210	77.4
Economic History of U. S.	34	12.5
Economic Geography	21	7.7
Labor Economics	21	7.7
Money and Banking	19	7.0
Comparative Economic Systems	16	5.9
Economics Institute or Workshop	14	5.1
Public Finance	8	2.9
National Income and Price Theory	7	2.5
History of Economic Thought	5	1.8
Others	42	15.4
No Response	3	1.1

III THE STATUS OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN OREGON HIGH SCHOOLS COMPARED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER STATES

Within the last ten years, about one-fifth of all the states in the United States have conducted at least one survey on the status of economic education within their respective secondary school systems. These studies often differ in emphasis and orientation, but most of them contain data similar in nature to that already presented in this study. By extracting key statistics from these reports, it is possible to compare the degree of economic education in Oregon relative to that in other states.

One recent study of all high schools in the United States with a minimum enrollment of 300 students reported that nearly 70% of all these schools offered a separate course in economics.[2] A weighted

[2]Jones, Galen, "The Current Status of Economics Teaching in the High Schools of the United States," Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principles, Nov., 1965, p. 7

average of those states listed in Table XI suggests the over-all proportion may be between 50 and 60 percent, but in either case Oregon is below the national norm.[3] The states in Table XI are ranked highest to lowest by the percentage of high schools offering economics, and, though Oregon exceeds Idaho and Oklahoma, two things suggest that the state of Oregon may actually be the last one on this list. First, the other studies are at least four years old. This has special meaning in light of the high growth rate of high school economics. For example, during the 1961-62 school year, 26% of all public high schools in Ohio offered a separate economics course. By 1964-65 just three years later, the proportion had risen to 60%. Second, the 13% of schools in Oklahoma offering economics enrolled 35% of all the state's students, while in Oregon 22% of the schools with economics have about 25% of the student population.

TABLE XI

The Percentage of High Schools Offering a Separate Economics Course for Select States and the Percentage of the State's High School Population Enrolled in Those Courses

State	Schools	Students
1. New York (1966-67)	70-75%	---
2. New Jersey (1962-63)	60%	7.8%
3. Ohio (1964-65)	60%	5.9%
4. South Dakota (1965-66)	55%	7.6%
5. Texas (1966-67)	53%	---
6. Michigan (1963-64)	53%	---
7. Arkansas (1966-67)	27%	2.2%
8. Nebraska (1964-65)	25%	---
9. Oregon (1968-69)	22%	2.0%
10. Idaho (1964-65)	20%	5.0%
11. Oklahoma (1961-62)	13%	2.5%

[3]Because the studies cover so many different years, it is not possible to find a consistent weighting factor, and so the 50 to 60% is an educated guess.

In addition to giving the percentage of high schools offering economics, Table XI also shows the percentage of all high school students taking economics in those states for which data is available. No recent average could be found for the percentage of high school students taking economics, but it seems apparent that whatever it is, Oregon's 2% is below the mark.[4]

TABLE XII

An Academic Profile of High School Economics Teachers

State	Mean Semester Hours of Credit	Median Semester Hours of Credit	Percentage of Teachers Who Majored in Ec.	Percentage of Teachers Who Minored in Ec.
New York[1]	15	--	16%	--
New York City[2]	16	12	9%	13%
New Jersey	12	11	13%	30%
Ohio	12-13	9-10	8%	15%
Oklahoma	12-13	9-10	--	--
Nebraska	--	--	13%	25%
Oregon[3]	9-10	6-7	12%	18%
South Dakota	8	7	8%	--
Arkansas	8	5-6	--	15%
Idaho	12	--	--	--

[1]Excludes New York City

[2]In New York City all graduating high school seniors must take one course in economics. This means more social studies teachers must teach an economics course and may explain why the mean and median of these teachers is so high, while the percentage of majors and minors is rather low. Actually, though, the median of 12 hours suggests half of the economics teachers in New York City have enough credits to satisfy a minor.

[3]Original data in quarter-hours was adjusted to semester hours.

[4]In the early 1960's the Joint Council on Economic Education estimated that 4 to 5% of all high school students were enrolled in economics, but since that estimate, no others have been made.

While the extent of economic education in Oregon high schools is well below the national average, the economics background of those who teach the separate economics course compares favorably with that of teachers in other states. Considering all four categories presented in Table XII, the academic qualifications of Oregon high school teachers equal or exceed those of similar teachers in South Dakota and Arkansas. This is somewhat surprising, since the extent of economic education in those two states is greater than that in Oregon. Nevertheless, the Oregon picture is not bright when one considers that The National Task Force on Economic Education has stated that 12 semester hours of college economics should be the minimum prerequisite for those teaching high school economics.

IV SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

One study has estimated that 30% of high school seniors planning to attend college plan to take a course in college economics.[5] Looked at from another point of view, this means 70% of such students are dependent on acquiring economic education before leaving high school. Most educators agree that economic literacy is an essential part of an informed populace. Though meager, the evidence that exists indicates high school provides the only formal training in economics most students will ever receive. In Oregon at present, 75% of all high school students attend schools that do not offer economics as a separate course of instruction. It is one thing not to elect to take economics; it is something altogether different not to have the chance to refuse.

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[5]Thompson, Paul J., Economic Education in Southwestern Minnesota Public High Schools (Monograph) Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Mankato State College, n.d., p. 34

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